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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: TIBET: ON EVE OF "SERF EMANCIPATION DAY," HEAVY
SECURITY REMAINS, NO POLICY CHANGES FORESEEN

REF: A. BEIJING 755
[1](#)B. BEIJING 726
[1](#)C. BEIJING 648
[1](#)D. BEIJING 605
[1](#)E. BEIJING 400

Classified By: Political Internal Unit Chief
Dan Kritenbrink. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) On the eve of China's "Serf Emancipation Day" on March 28, PRC security forces continued to blanket Tibet and the predominantly Tibetan areas of Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan provinces to preclude outbreaks of mass unrest. Following the relatively uneventful passage of the 50th anniversary of the failed 1959 uprising in Tibet on March 10 and the one-year anniversary of the March 14, 2008 riots that began in Lhasa, Embassy contacts anticipated quiet during orchestrated celebrations of Serf Emancipation Day, the new holiday created by the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) People's Congress in January. Contacts predicted China's hard-line policy on Tibet would continue, citing President Hu Jintao's "personal stake" in the current approach and leaders' aversion to appearing "soft" as reasons not to expect change anytime soon. Although some observers were critical of Chinese actions, especially those of TAR Party Secretary Zhang Qingli, they noted that outside criticism of the PRC's Tibet policy was exploited to help maintain the status quo by tapping into the Chinese public's nationalist sensitivities. China's propaganda campaign on Tibet and the Dalai Lama, including articles from pro-government Tibetan religious figures and a large Beijing museum exhibit, has been in full swing in the run-up to the March 28 holiday. End Summary.

SECURITY FORCES CONTINUE TO BLANKET TIBETAN AREAS

[1](#)2. (SBU) On the eve of the new "Serf Emancipation Day" holiday on March 28, Chinese security forces continued to blanket Tibet and the predominantly Tibetan areas of Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan provinces to preclude outbreaks of mass unrest. Both March 10, which marked the 50th anniversary of the failed 1959 Tibetan uprising, and March 14, the one-year anniversary of the 2008 riots that began in Lhasa, passed relatively quietly. There have, however, been isolated reports of unrest, including a March 22 incident in the Guoluo (Golog) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, where according to official PRC and Western media, nearly 100 monks attacked a police station in response to detention of a monk for waving the banned Tibetan flag; the monk later allegedly escaped police custody and killed himself by jumping into a river. Six of the monks were arrested, with another 89 reportedly having "surrendered" to police.

[1](#)3. (C) Beijing-based contacts agreed that the heavy PRC security presence in Tibet and Tibetan areas would remain

through the remainder of the year, and that this show of force would likely ensure that the March 28 Serf Emancipation Day, and the rest of 2009, would pass without a repeat of the widespread unrest witnessed in Tibetan areas during 2008. Ding Kuisong (protect), Vice Chairman of the China Reform Forum think tank, largely echoed official views by attributing last year's unrest that began March 14 in Lhasa to agitation from "monks both within China and out, along with NGOs," who wanted to "take advantage of the Beijing Olympics" to advance the "Tibetan cause." Ding asserted that the Chinese Government has now "broken" the communication links between domestic activists and external groups, so that even though lingering resentments likely remained, they would be expressed "quietly and peacefully" this year.

14. (C) Echoing the view that Tibetan areas were likely to remain relatively stable through 2009, China Economic Times senior reporter Zhang Xiantang (protect) told PolOffs March 18 that "nearly everyone" linked to last year's unrest in Tibetan areas had been "detained." In particular, the 2008 demonstrations represented a "serious setback" for the Dalai Lama, as "almost all of the Dalai Lama's people in China" were among those detained, Zhang claimed. A strict crackdown on dissent in Tibetan regions imposed after last year's unrest had not let up, he noted, lamenting that Tibetan areas remain off-limits to foreign diplomats, journalists and tourists. Internet and cellular phone communications had also been restricted in many Tibetan areas. Zhang thus predicted that future displays of dissent by Tibetans most likely would not happen during high-profile anniversary dates when the government is "paying attention," but rather might occur on "random dates" when the authorities "least expected"

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trouble.

LEADERSHIP POLITICS: HU'S "PERSONAL STAKE" IN TIBET

15. (C) Embassy contacts predicted that China's hard-line policy on Tibet would continue for the foreseeable future, citing PRC leadership politics as one factor preventing any major change. There was "no way" China's Tibet policy would change prior to 2012, when Hu Jintao was expected to step down as CCP General Secretary, journalist Zhang Xiantang asserted, given Hu's "personal stake" in the status quo. Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) Professor Dong Lisheng (protect) separately agreed on March 19, telling PolOffs that President Hu remains primarily in charge of Tibet policy, because "for Hu, Tibet is personal." Hu was singled out for praise by former paramount leader Deng Xiaoping in 1989 for suppressing Tibetan protests while serving as Tibet Party Secretary, Dong said, asserting that Hu's "tough line" on Tibet was one factor in his subsequent rise. Zhang Xiantang described Tibet as a "face" issue for Hu.

16. (C) Even beyond Hu Jintao, there was a general aversion among leaders to appearing "soft" on Tibet, Dong Lisheng asserted, noting that "history had not been kind" to those leaders who had shown flexibility on China's rule over the TAR. In fact, Dong said, appearing "lenient" on Tibet might make individual leaders "vulnerable" to criticism from others, thereby inviting "political trouble." Both Dong and Zhang cited the example of former Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang, who was ousted in 1987, citing his "soft" line on Tibet as one of the many criticisms leveled against him by Party elders that led to his downfall. Expressing pessimism that PRC policy on Tibet would change even following Hu Jintao's anticipated departure as CCP General Secretary in 2012, Zhang Xiantang dismissed the Dalai Lama's purported hope that Vice President Xi Jinping, who is seen as the front-runner to succeed Hu Jintao, might take a more "liberal" approach to Tibet, as his father, former Vice Premier Xi Zhongxun, reportedly had. "Xi Jinping is no Xi Zhongxun," Zhang declared. (Note: Zhang's analysis tracked

largely with that of human rights activist John Kamm (ref A), asserting that both Hu Jintao and the Dalai Lama are in a "waiting game" (Zhang called it a "gambling match"), in which both are "betting" that the other will "depart the stage" first in the hopes that things will be better afterward.)

RISING NATIONALISM REINFORCES HARD-LINE POLICY

17. (C) Beyond leadership politics, another factor arguing against a change in China's Tibet policy is the increasingly "nationalistic public mood" that the leadership must heed, according to CASS Professor Dong Lisheng. Dong cited the popularity of the book, "Unhappy China" ("Zhongguo Bu Gaoxing") as representative of rising nationalist sentiment among the Chinese people, which tends to motivate the PRC Government to appear "tough and unyielding" on issues regarded as most prone to Western criticism, including Tibet.

Coupled with concerns over this "sensitive year" in which China had concerns about the global economic downturn and its effects on social stability, as well as an "increasingly conservative" domestic political environment, left one with "little optimism" for a change on Tibet policy, Dong concluded.

SERF EMANCIPATION DAY PART OF A "TIT-FOR-TAT FIGHT"

18. (C) Recent public comments by PRC officials indicated that China considered the Serf Emancipation Day to be a key part of its hard-line approach on Tibet. For example, in a March 6 press event on the margins of the National Peoples Congress (NPC), Legqog, the Chairman of the TAR People's Congress, said the new holiday "is a major move to wage a tit-for-tat fight against the Dalai clique" and an opportunity to "educate" Chinese youth "because younger generations now know very little about the history of struggle made to emancipate serfs." Some Embassy contacts criticized the government's creation of the holiday, saying it would only provoke further Tibetan hostility. Journalist Zhang Xiantang said some of the problems in Tibet were "self-created" by PRC officials including TAR Party Secretary Zhang Qingli, who was widely viewed as a "hard-liner." Zhang Xiantang cited Zhang Qingli's description of the Dalai Lama last year as "a wolf in monk's robes," as "particularly unhelpful," resulting in Zhang Qingli's being criticized by other Party leaders. The comments made the Chinese Government "look bad," Zhang said, as China was simultaneously vilifying the Dalai Lama while also holding negotiations with his representatives. Dong

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Lisheng predicted that, eventually, China's hard-line Tibet policy could "backfire," as the PRC will not be able to control resentment there "forever."

"PANCHEN" EDITORIAL SUPPORTING CHINA'S RULE

19. (SBU) China's propaganda campaign on Tibet and the Dalai Lama has been in full swing in the run-up to the March 28 holiday. Countless newspaper articles and editorials in recent weeks have promoted Chinese sovereignty over Tibet; extolled Tibet's achievements in "democracy," human rights, religious freedom, education, health care and infrastructure; and condemned "the Dalai clique" and other "hostile forces." Pro-government Tibetan Buddhist figures have been front and center in this propaganda effort. China's domestic media gave extensive coverage to a People's Daily editorial by Erdeni Qoigyig Gyibo (aka Erdini Qoigyijabu), whom the Chinese Government recognized as the 11th Panchen Lama even though he was rejected by many Tibetans. In the article, the PRC "Panchen Lama" stated that "freeing serfs and slaves completely conforms to the purpose of Buddhism," and that "real Buddhists should ardently love their countries and their religion." Similarly, a March 20 People's Daily article signed by Pakpala Geleg Nyamgyal, a "living Buddha"

who is Chairman of the TAR People's Political Consultative Conference, reiterated many of the Chinese Government's positions on Tibet, including by stating "the historical fact that Tibet has been an inalienable part of China since ancient times."

MUSEUM EXHIBIT PRESENTS "THE TRUTH" ABOUT TIBET

¶10. (SBU) A central element to the "Serf Emancipation Day" propaganda offensive has been a "50th Anniversary of Democratic Reforms in Tibet" exhibit at Beijing's Cultural Palace of Nationalities. PolOffs quietly visited the exhibit on March 24 and found the exhibit to be well-attended, with approximately 300 visitors present, including several university student groups. The exhibit featured pre-1959 photographs of Tibetan "serfs" living in squalor next to "post-liberation" images of "joyful" Tibetans voting, attending school and receiving medical treatment. Many visitors appeared transfixed by video footage depicting acts of violence during the March 2008 unrest in Lhasa, including graphic images of police pulling corpses out of a charred building and an interview with a young woman repeatedly wailing, "Why did they do this to us?" in Mandarin. The vast majority of comments in visitors' books at the exhibit were exclamations of surprise at learning "the truth" about Tibet, in addition to expressions of support for the PRC's current Tibet policies. In a story entitled, "Exhibition Dispells (sic) Foreign Ambassadors' Misconception About Tibet," Xinhua News Agency reported that 150 diplomats attended the exhibit on March 25 at the government's invitation. The Xinhua story included positive quotes about China's Tibet policy allegedly made by the Ambassadors of South Africa, Ghana and Belarus, among others.
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